

The Life of a Growth Team

What follows is a made up story of a Growth Team under a possible new pattern and focus for Growth Teams that is being proposed. After the story some of the new ideas and differences with the present pattern will be listed and explained. There is also a visual representation of the new process at the end of the paper.

A Story of a Growth Team

It was June 2017 and Ray, Sarah and Frank sat in the vicar's study. There was a sense of excitement in the room as the vicar laid out the vision for the upcoming Explore Group to be launched in September. Yet the task was also daunting! The three of them, with Ray as the leader were to spend the next few months talking to people in the church who were either new or uncertain in their faith or not yet Christians to encourage them that the Explore Group was for them. They were also planning to put on a few events over the summer to connect with people who might not yet even be coming to church in the hope that they too might join such a group.

As the summer months went by the team worked well together and met regularly to plan and pray. They gained the support of others in the church in putting on a few events, which proved popular and found that each of them were beginning to connect with a few people in the church that were really interested in joining an Explore Group.

In the end they settled on a time of the week that would suit most of the interested people and advertised the start of their first Explore Group at the beginning of October. As they met before the meeting to pray there was real apprehension. Would people turn up? They prayed in turn for each of the people they were hoping to come, then went down to the meeting room to greet people as they turned up. There were disappointments as some didn't show, but nonetheless there were 7 people there eager to engage with the first of the Life Explored sessions.

As the weeks went by that autumn sadly one person dropped out, but encouragingly two new people joined. The group were gelling together and enjoying one another's company. The Life Explored course finished in December, but they had one more meeting for a social and encouraged people to join them again after Christmas for a Christianity Explored course.

Over the Christmas period Ray, Sarah and Frank worked with the vicar and church to further advertise the Christianity Explored course to see if there were others who might be interested. In the end when the group started up again one person had sadly dropped out, but another three had joined! There were now 10 in the group and 3 leaders, so it was decided to run two small groups for Christianity Explored, but to watch the DVDs together. Ray led one group and Sarah and Frank led the other.

As the course went on three of the members dropped out because of changes in work patterns and family pressures. So, at the end of the course as they started on what was now a Discipleship Explored course they came back together as one group, with Ray leading most of the sessions, but Sarah and Frank taking one session each.

With all the explored courses finished it was time for the Explore Group to transition into a normal Growth Team. At this point a few of the members also took a short confirmation course with the vicar and were confirmed - which was a great joy to the whole group, and a real source of encouragement for Ray, Sarah and Frank.

It was now spring 2018 and Ray, Sarah and Frank helped the group transition into being a Growth Team. There was now no longer the Christianity Explored DVDs, but a chance to reflect on the sermon from the previous Sunday at church. At first the group focussed mainly on the follow up questions on the Growth Team sheets, and found ways of helping people to take turns in praying as part of the group. Soon people relaxed into the new pattern. There was an exciting sense that people were growing in their faith.

As the autumn came round, the group started praying for a new Explore Group that was being set up and one or two members even stood up in front of church and at social events to encourage people to join the new Explore Group. A couple of members decided that they wanted to do the Explore Group again rather than be part of a Growth Team, but they were replaced by a couple who were already Christians and recently moved into the area.

Sadly that Christmas, Frank had to step down as co-leader, because he was moving away from Ramsgate. However, Ray was able to persuade one of the new couple, Boris, to step up as co-leader and take his place.

As 2019 came, the team were encouraged to think about people they could pray for to join a future Explore Group. One of the members, Jane really caught hold of this idea. She went regularly to Play and Praise and had had some good conversations with a couple of other young mums there who were becoming interested in the Christian faith. One of them had even started coming to church regularly. When the vicar met with the Growth Team leaders and asked who might be potential co-leaders for the new Explore Group it suddenly occurred to Ray that Jane would be ideal!

Although Jane was leaving them the Growth Team were really behind her. They prayed hard for the new Explore Group and at Jane's request even ran a quiz evening in the September as a social event to advertise the new Explore Group. Although, she had moved on Jane still very much had the backing of the Growth Team.

It was now 2020 and Ray's health was deteriorating. Reluctantly he stepped down from being a Growth Team leader and Sarah, who had been with the team from the start stepped up to be the new Growth Team leader. There was no-one in the team who felt ready to be a co-leader, so the vicar recruited a member from another Growth Team to come in and step into the role. Her name was Amy.

However, Amy was also someone who had caught the vision of making new disciples. She was involved in a new Outreach Team aimed at middle-age ladies that met regularly for breakfast on Saturday mornings and felt that a couple of the non-church ladies who came to that were open to joining an Explore Group. So it was no surprise that Amy was soon off to be leader of the new Explore Group starting in September 2020. Once again the Growth Team were really behind Amy and offered prayer support and ran another quiz evening to help launch the new Explore Group.

Amy needed to be replaced, and this time one of the members, Sid, now felt up to the role and so as 2020 rolled on to 2021 the Growth Team continued on at a steady pace.

However, in 2021, a number of the members had to leave. One or two moved away, including Boris one of the co-leaders, some couldn't make the night they met anymore and decided to move to a different Growth Team and a couple just became too ill to carry on attending. Too many people left to be replaced and there was now only a leader, one co-leader and two members. It was reluctantly then decided that at the end of the summer of 2021, four years after the Team had started that it needed to close.

It wasn't the end for the people in the team though. Jane went on to replace another Growth Team leader who had had to step down and Sid went on to be a co-leader for the new Explore Group, whilst the other two members were able to join other teams.

However, they decided to have a party to celebrate all that had been achieved over those 4 years. Old members were invited back and in all 15 turned up to the celebration. As a team they had seen people come to faith, strong supportive Christian relationships built, people strengthened in their faith and a couple of people move on into new leadership roles. They had also played a key part in helping to launch three other Growth Teams, which were all going strong. As Ray and Jane chatted and remembered that meeting with the vicar in 2017, they rejoiced that so much had been achieved.

Growth Teams - The Vision

The Church's Engine of Growth:

- Making new disciples
- Teaching present disciples
- Building community
- Developing leaders

Growth Teams - What's new?

1. **Led by small teams** not individuals. These teams will include an overall leader and two co-leaders, who will each lead a session roughly once a term.
2. Emphasis on the new role of **co-leaders** as a key to developing leaders.
3. Introducing the **Explore Group** as an integral part of the Growth Teams framework. The Explore Team will take people through the three Christianity Explored courses: Life Explored, Christianity Explored, Discipleship Explored, before then taking the group on to become a Growth Team if the numbers can justify it.
4. All Growth Teams should be involved in the church setting up of at least one new Explore Group each year. This can be through prayer, running a social event, members sharing testimonies or sending a co-leader or leader to help lead the new group.
5. The new team leader and two co-leaders of an Explore Group will work to recruit people on to the Explore Group from new and existing members in church, personal contacts and social events.

A Diagrammatic Representation of the New Process

